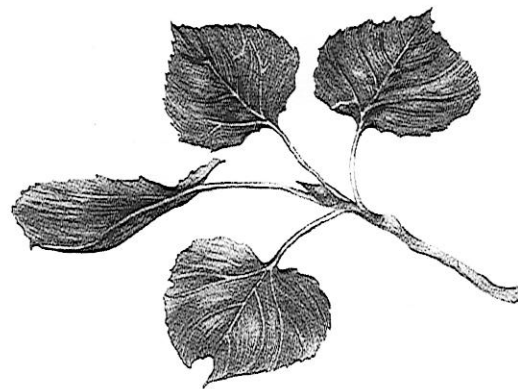


3. In a paragraph, define one of the following slang expressions for someone who has never heard the term: *dis*, *wigged out*, *dweeb*, *awesome*, *fool around*, *wimp*, *druggie*, *snob*, *freak*, *loser*, *loner*, *freeloader*, *burnout*, *soul*, *quack*, "chill," *pig-out*, *gross out*, *winging it*, "bad," "sweet."

ARGUMENT AND PERSUASION

Stating Opinions and Proposals



THE METHOD

Practically every day, we try to persuade ourselves or someone else. We usually attempt such persuasion without being aware that we follow any special method at all. Often, we'll state an *opinion*: We'll tell someone our own way of viewing things. We say to a friend, "I'm starting to like Senator Clark. Look at all she's done to help people with disabilities. Look at her voting record on toxic waste." And, having stated these opinions, we might go on to make a *proposal*, to recommend that some action be taken. Addressing our friend, we might suggest, "Hey, Senator Clark is talking on campus at four-thirty. Want to come with me and listen to her?"

Sometimes you try to convince yourself that a certain way of interpreting things is right. You even set forth an opinion in writing—as in a letter to a friend who has asked, "Now that you're at New Age College, how do you like the place?" You may write a letter of protest to a landlord who wants to raise your rent, pointing out that the bathroom hot water faucet doesn't work. As a concerned citizen, you may wish to speak your mind in an occasional letter to a newspaper or to your elected representatives.

If you should enter certain professions, you will be expected to persuade people in writing. Before arguing a case in court, a lawyer prepares briefs setting forth all the points in favor of his or her side. Business executives regularly put in writing their ideas for new products and ventures, for improvements in cost control and job efficiency. Researchers write proposals for grants to obtain money to support their work. Scientists write and publish papers to persuade the scientific community that their findings are valid, often stating hypotheses, or tentative opinions.

Even if you never produce a single persuasive work (which is very unlikely), you will certainly encounter such works directed at you. In truth, we live our lives under a steady rain of opinions and proposals. Organizations that work for causes campaign with posters and direct mail, all hoping that we will see things their way. Moreover, we are bombarded with proposals from people who wish us to act. Religious leaders urge us to lead more virtuous lives. Advertisers urge us to rush right out and buy the large economy size.

Small wonder, then, that argument and persuasion—and CRITICAL READING of argument and persuasion—may be among the most useful skills a college student can acquire. Time and again, your instructors will ask you to criticize or to state opinions, either in class or in writing. You may be asked to state your view of anything from the electoral college to animal experimentation. You may be asked to judge the desirability or undesirability of compulsory testing for AIDS or the revision of existing immigration laws. On an examination in, say, sociology, you may be asked, “Suggest three practical approaches to the most pressing needs of disadvantaged people in urban areas.” Critically reading other people’s arguments and composing your own, you will find, helps you discover what you think, refine it, and share what you believe.

Is there a difference between argument and persuasion? It is, admittedly, not always clear. Strictly speaking, PERSUASION aims to influence readers’ actions, or their support for an action, by engaging their beliefs and feelings, while ARGUMENT aims to win readers’ agreement with an assertion or claim by engaging their powers of reasoning. But most effective persuasion or argument contains elements of both methods; hence the confusion. In this book we tend to use the terms interchangeably. And one other point: We tend to talk here about *writing* argument and persuasion, but most of what we say has to do with *reading* them as well. When we discuss your need, as a writer, to support your assertions, we are also discussing your need, as a reader, to question the support other authors provide for their assertions. In reading arguments critically, you apply the critical reading skills we discussed in the book’s Introduction—ANALYSIS, INFERENCE, SYNTHESIS, EVALUATION—to a particular kind of writing.

Basic Considerations

Transaction Between Writer and Reader

Unlike some television advertisers, responsible writers of argument and persuasion do not try to storm people’s minds. In writing a paper for a course, you persuade by gentler means: by sharing your view with a reader willing to consider it. You’ll want to learn how to express your view clearly and vigorously. But to be fair and persuasive, it is important to understand your reader’s view as well.

In stating your opinion, you present the truth as you see it: “The immigration laws discourage employers from hiring nonnative workers” or “The immigration laws protect legal aliens.” To persuade your readers that your view makes sense, you need not begin by proclaiming that, by Heaven, your view is absolutely right and should prevail. Instead, you might begin by trying to state what your reader probably thinks, as best you can infer it. You don’t consider views that differ from your own merely to flatter your reader. You do so to correct your own view and make it more accurate. Regarded in this light, argument and persuasion aren’t cynical ways to pull other people’s strings. Writer and reader become two sensible people trying to find a common ground. This view will relieve you, whenever you have to state your opinions in writing, of the terrible obligation to be 100 percent right at all times.

Thesis Sentence

In an argument you champion or defend your opinion about something. This opinion is the THESIS, or *claim*, of your argument, and it will probably appear in your essay as your THESIS SENTENCE or sentences. Usually, but not always, you’ll state your thesis sentence at the beginning of your essay, making a play for readers’ attention and clueing them in to your purpose. But if you think readers may have difficulty accepting your thesis until they’ve heard some or all of your argument, then you might save the thesis sentence for the middle or end.

The essays in this chapter provide a variety of thesis sentences as models. Here are three examples:

For crimes involving the deliberate and inexcusable taking of human life, by men openly defiant of all civilized order—for such crimes [the death penalty] seems...a just and proper punishment. (H. L. Mencken, “The Penalty of Death”)

I think the observable reluctance of the majority of Americans to assert themselves in minor matters is related to our increased sense of helplessness in an age of technology and centralized political and economic power. (William F. Buckley, Jr., “Why Don’t We Complain?”)

A bill [that forbids importing goods from factories that use forced child labor] ... is of no use unless it goes hand in hand with programs that will offer a new life to these newly released children. (Chitra Divakaruni, "Live Free and Starve")

Evidence and Appeals

To support the thesis of your argument, you need EVIDENCE—anything that demonstrates what you're claiming. Evidence may include facts, statistics (facts expressed in numbers), expert opinions, examples, reported experience. Chitra Divakaruni, for example, supports the thesis quoted above with DESCRIPTIONS of the lives of child laborers, a statistic about the number of child laborers, and most notably an extended example of a child laborer CONTRASTED with other children who have no resources at all.

Like other writers of argument, Divakaruni also appeals to readers' intelligence and to their feelings. In appealing to reason—a RATIONAL APPEAL—she relies on conventional methods of reasoning (see the facing page) and supplies the evidence cited above. In appealing to feelings—an EMOTIONAL APPEAL—she acknowledges her American readers' probable sympathy for child laborers, tries to broaden that sympathy, and reminds readers of their own relative privilege. Editorials in publications for special audiences (such as members of religious denominations, or people whose political views are far to the left or right) tend to contain few factual surprises for their subscribers, who presumably read to have their views reinforced. In spoken discourse, you can hear emotional appeals in a commencement day speech or a Fourth of July oration. An impressive example of emotional appeal is included in Part Two (p. 437): the speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream." Dr. King's speech did not tell its audience anything new to them, for the listeners were mostly African Americans disappointed in the American Dream. The speaker appeals primarily not to reason but to feelings—and to the willingness of his listeners to be inspired.

Emotional argument, to be sure, can sometimes be cynical manipulation. It can mean selling a sucker a bill of shoddy goods by appealing to pride or shame—"Do you really want to deprive your children of what's best for them?" But emotional argument can also stir readers to constructive action by fair means. It recognizes that we are not intellectual robots but creatures with feelings. Indeed, in any effective argument, a writer had better engage the feelings of readers or they may reply, "True enough, but who cares?" Argument, to succeed in persuading, makes us feel that a writer's views are close to our own.

Yet another resource in argument is ETHICAL APPEAL: impressing your reader that you are a well-informed person of good will, good sense, and

appeal by reasoning carefully, writing well, and collecting ample evidence. You can also cite or quote respected authorities. If you don't know whether an authority is respected, you can ask a reference librarian for tips on finding out, or talk to an instructor who is a specialist in that field.

In arguing, you don't prove your assertion in the same irrefutable way in which a chemist demonstrates that hydrogen will burn. If you say, "Health coverage for the uninsured should be given top priority in Congress," that kind of claim isn't clearly either true or false. Argument takes place in areas that invite more than one opinion. In writing an argument, you help your reader see and understand just one open-eyed, open-minded view of reality.

Reasoning

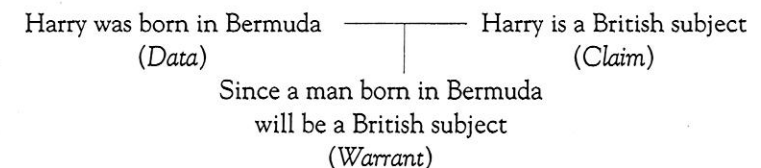
When we argue rationally, we reason—that is, we make statements that lead to a conclusion. From the time of the ancient Greeks down to our own day, distinctly different methods of proceeding from statements to conclusions have been devised. This section will tell you of a recent, informal method of reasoning and also of two traditional methods. Understanding these methods, knowing how to use them, and being able to recognize when they are misused will make you a better writer and reader.

The Toulmin Method

Data, claim, and warrant. In recent decades, a simple, practical method of reasoning has been devised by the British philosopher Stephen Toulmin.¹ Helpfully, Toulmin has divided a typical argument into three parts:

1. The DATA: the evidence to prove something
2. The CLAIM: what you are proving with the data
3. The WARRANT: the assumption or principle that connects the data to the claim

Any clear, explicit argument has to have all three parts. Toulmin's own example of such an argument is this:



¹ *The Uses of Argument* (1969) sets forth Toulmin's system in detail. His views are further explained and applied by Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede in *Decision by Debate* (2nd ed., 1978) and by Toulmin himself, with Richard Rieke and Allan Janik, in *An Introduction to Reasoning* (2nd ed., 1984).

Of course, the data for a larger, more controversial claim will be more extensive. Here are some claims that would call for many more data, perhaps thousands of words.

The war on drugs is not winnable.

The United States must help to destroy drug production in South America.

Drug addiction is a personal matter.

The warrant at the center. The warrant, that middle term, is often crucially important. It is usually an ASSUMPTION or a GENERALIZATION that explains *why* the claim follows from the data. Often a writer won't bother to state a warrant because it is obvious: "In his bid for reelection, Mayor Perkins failed miserably. Out of 5,000 votes cast for both candidates, he received only 200." The warrant might be stated, "To make what I would consider a strong showing, he would have had to receive 2,000 votes or more," but it is clear that 200 out of 5,000 is a small minority, and no further explanation seems necessary.

A flaw in many arguments, though, is that the warrant is not clear. A clear warrant is essential. To be persuaded, a reader needs to understand your assumptions and the thinking that follows from them. If you were to argue, "Drug abuse is a serious problem in the United States. Therefore, the United States must help to destroy drug production in Latin America," then your reader might well be left wondering why the second statement follows from the first. But if you were to add, between the statements, "As long as drugs are manufactured in Latin America, they will be smuggled into the United States, and drug abuse will continue," then you supply a warrant. You show why your claim follows from your data—which, of course, you must also supply to make your case.

The unstated warrant can pitch an argument into trouble—whether your own or another writer's. Since warrants are usually assumptions or generalizations, rather than assertions of fact, they are valid only if readers accept or agree that they are valid. With stated warrants, any weaknesses are more likely to show. Suppose someone asserts that a certain woman should not be elected mayor because women cannot form ideas independently of their husbands and this woman's husband has bad ideas on how to run the city. At least the warrant—that women cannot form ideas independently of their husbands—is out there on the table, exposed for all to inspect. But unstated warrants can be just as absurd, or even just doubtful, and pass unnoticed because they are not exposed. Here's the same argument without its warrant: "She shouldn't be elected mayor because her husband has bad ideas on how to run the city."

Here's another argument with an unstated warrant, this one adapted from a magazine advertisement: "Scientists have no proof just statisti-

cal correlations, linking smoking and heart disease, so you needn't worry about the connection." Now, the fact that this ad was placed by a cigarette manufacturer would tip off any reasonably alert reader to beware of bias in the claim. To discover the slant, we need to examine the unstated warrant, which runs something like this: "Since they are not proof, statistical correlations are worthless as guides to behavior." It is true that statistical correlations are not scientific proof, by which we generally mean repeated results obtained under controlled laboratory conditions—the kind of conditions to which human beings cannot ethically be subjected. But statistical correlations *can* establish connections and in fact inform much of our healthful behavior, such as getting physical exercise, avoiding fatty foods, brushing our teeth, and not driving while intoxicated. The advertiser's unstated warrant isn't valid, so neither is the argument.

Example of a Toulmin argument. Let's look at how the data-claim-warrant scheme can work in constructing an argument. In an assignment for her course in English composition, Maire Flynn was asked to produce a condensed argument in three short paragraphs. The first paragraph was to set forth some data; the second, a claim; and the third, a warrant. The result became a kind of outline that the writer could then expand into a whole essay. Here is Flynn's argument.

DATA

Over the past five years, assistance in the form of food stamps has had the effect of increasing the number of people on welfare instead of reducing it. Despite this help, 95 percent of long-term recipients remain below the poverty line today.

CLAIM

The present system of distributing food stamps is a dismal failure, a less effective way to help the needy than other possible ways.

WARRANT

No one is happy to receive charity. We need to encourage people to quit the welfare rolls; we need to make sure that government aid goes only to the deserving. More effective than giving out food stamps would be to help untrained young people learn job skills; to help single mothers with small children to obtain child care, freeing them for the job market; and to enlarge and improve our state employment counseling and job-placement services. The problem of poverty will be helped only if more people will find jobs and become self-sufficient.

In her warrant paragraph, Flynn spells out her reasons for holding her opinion—the one she states in her claim. "The warrant," she found,

good warrant, hers expresses those thoughts that her data set in motion. Another way of looking at the warrant: It is the thinking that led the writer on to the opinion she holds. In this statement of her warrant, Flynn makes clear her assumptions: that people who can support themselves don't deserve food stamps and that a person is better off (and happier) holding a job than receiving charity. By generating more ideas and evidence, she was easily able to expand both the data paragraph and the warrant paragraph, and the result was a coherent essay of seven hundred words.

How, by the way, would someone who didn't accept Flynn's warrant argue with her? What about old, infirm, or disabled persons who cannot work? What quite different assumptions about poverty might be possible?

Deductive and Inductive Reasoning

Stephen Toulmin's method of argument is a fairly recent—and very helpful—way to analyze and construct arguments. Two other reliable methods date back to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who identified the complementary processes of **INDUCTIVE REASONING** (induction) and **DEDUCTIVE REASONING** (deduction). In *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert M. Pirsig gives examples of deductive and inductive reasoning:

If the cycle goes over a bump and the engine misfires, and then goes over another bump and the engine misfires, and then goes over another bump and the engine misfires, and then goes over a long smooth stretch of road and there is no misfiring, and then goes over a fourth bump and the engine misfires again, one can logically conclude that the misfiring is caused by the bumps. That is induction: reasoning from particular experiences to general truths.

Deductive inferences do the reverse. They start with general knowledge and predict a specific observation. For example if, from reading the hierarchy of facts about the machine, the mechanic knows the horn of the cycle is powered exclusively by electricity from the battery, then he can logically infer that if the battery is dead the horn will not work. That is deduction.

In inductive reasoning, the method of the sciences, we collect bits of evidence on which to base generalizations. From interviews with a hundred self-identified conservative Republicans (the evidence), you might conclude that conservative Republicans favor less government regulation of business (the generalization). The more evidence you have, the more trustworthy your generalization is, but it would never be airtight unless you talked to every conservative Republican in the country. Since such thoroughness is impractical if not impossible, inductive reasoning

involves making an *inductive leap* from the evidence to the conclusion. The smaller the leap—the more evidence you have—the better.

Deductive reasoning works the other way, from a general statement to particular cases. The basis of deduction is the **SYLLOGISM**, a three-step form of reasoning practiced by Aristotle:

All men are mortal.

Socrates is a man.

Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

The first statement (the major premise) is a generalization about a large group: It is the result of inductive reasoning. The second statement (the minor premise) says something about a particular member of that large group. The third statement (the conclusion) follows inevitably from the premises and applies the generalization to the particular: If the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true. Here is another syllogism:

MAJOR PREMISE: Conservative Republicans favor less government regulation of business.

MINOR PREMISE: William F. Buckley, Jr., is a conservative Republican.

CONCLUSION: Therefore, William F. Buckley, Jr., favors less government regulation of business.

Problems with deductive reasoning start in the premises. In 1633, Scipio Chiaramonti, professor of philosophy at the University of Pisa, came up with this untrustworthy syllogism: "Animals, which move, have limbs and muscles. The earth has no limbs and muscles. Hence, the earth does not move." This is bad deductive reasoning, and its flaw is to assume that all things need limbs and muscles to move—ignoring raindrops, rivers, and many other moving things. In the next pages, we'll look at some of the things that can go wrong with any kind of reasoning.

Logical Fallacies

In arguments we read and hear, we often meet logical **FALLACIES**: errors in reasoning that lead to wrong conclusions. From the time when you start thinking about your proposition or claim and planning your paper, you'll need to watch out for them. To help you recognize logical fallacies when you see them or hear them, and so guard against them when you write, here is a list of the most common.

- *Non sequitur* (from the Latin, "it does not follow"): stating a conclusion that doesn't follow from the first premise or premises. "I've lived in this town a long time—why, my grandfather was the first mayor—so I'm against putting fluoride in the drinking water."

- *Oversimplification*: supplying neat and easy explanations for large and complicated phenomena. "No wonder drug abuse is out of control. Look at how the courts have hobbled police officers." Oversimplified solutions are also popular: "All these teenage kids that get in trouble with the law—why, they ought to ship 'em over to China. That would straighten 'em out!" (See also p. 300.)
- *Hasty generalization*: leaping to a generalization from inadequate or faulty evidence. The most familiar hasty generalization is the stereotype: "Men aren't sensitive enough to be day-care providers." "Women are too emotional to fight in combat."
- *Either/or reasoning*: assuming that a reality may be divided into only two parts or extremes; assuming that a given problem has only one of two possible solutions. "What's to be done about the trade imbalance with Asia? Either we ban all Asian imports, or American industry will collapse." Obviously, either/or reasoning is a kind of extreme oversimplification.
- *Argument from doubtful or unidentified authority*: "We ought to castrate all sex offenders; Uncle Oswald says we should." Or: "According to reliable sources, my opponent is lying."
- *Argument ad hominem* (from the Latin, "to the man"): attacking a person's views by attacking his or her character. "Mayor Burns is divorced and estranged from his family. How can we listen to his pleas for a city nursing home?"
- *Begging the question*: taking for granted from the start what you set out to demonstrate. When you reason in a *logical* way, you state that because something is true, then, as a result, some other truth follows. When you beg the question, however, you repeat that what is true is true. If you argue, for instance, that dogs are a menace to people because they are dangerous, you don't prove a thing, since the idea that dogs are dangerous is already assumed in the statement that they are a menace. Beggars of questions often just repeat what they already believe, only in different words. This fallacy sometimes takes the form of arguing in a circle, or demonstrating a premise by a conclusion and a conclusion by a premise: "I am in college because that is the right thing to do. Going to college is the right thing to do because it is expected of me."
- *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (from the Latin, "after this, therefore because of this"), or *post hoc* for short: assuming that because B follows A, B was caused by A. "Ever since the city suspended height restrictions on skyscrapers, the city budget has been balanced." (See also p. 300.)
- *False analogy*: the claim of persuasive likeness when no significant likeness exists. An ANALOGY asserts that because two things are comparable in some respects, they are comparable in other respects as

well. Analogies cannot serve as evidence in a rational argument because the differences always outweigh the similarities; but analogies can reinforce such arguments if the subjects are indeed similar in some ways. If they aren't, the analogy is false. Many observers see the "war on drugs" as a false and damaging analogy because warfare aims for clear victory over a specific, organized enemy, whereas the complete eradication of illegal drugs is probably unrealistic and, in any event, the "enemy" isn't well defined: the drugs themselves? users? sellers? producers? the producing nations? (These critics urge approaching drugs as a social problem to be skillfully managed and reduced.)

THE PROCESS

In stating an opinion, you set forth and support a claim—a truth you believe. You may find such a truth by thinking and feeling, by reading, by talking to your instructors or fellow students, by listening to a discussion of some problem or controversy.

In stating a proposal, you already have an opinion in mind, and from there, you go on to urge an action or a solution to a problem. Usually, these two statements will take place within the same piece of writing: A writer will first set forth a view ("Compact discs are grossly overpriced") and then go right on to a proposal ("Compact discs should be discounted in the college store").

Whether your essay states an opinion, a proposal, or both, it is likely to contain similar ingredients. One essential is your thesis—the proposition or claim you are going to defend. As we noted earlier (p. 375), the likeliest spot for your thesis statement is near the start of your essay, where you might also explain why you think the thesis worth upholding, perhaps showing how it concerns your readers. If you plan to include both an opinion and a proposal in your essay, you may wish to set forth your opinion first, saving your proposal for later, perhaps for your conclusion.

Your thesis stated, introduce your least important point first. Then build in a crescendo to the strongest point you have. This structure will lend emphasis to your essay and perhaps make your chain of ideas more persuasive as the reader continues to follow it.

For every point, give evidence: facts, figures, examples, expert opinions. If you introduce statistics, make sure that they are up to date and fairly represented. In an essay advocating a law against smoking, it would be unfair to declare that "in Pottsville, Illinois, last year, 50 percent of all deaths were caused by lung cancer" if only two people died in Pottsville last year—one of them struck by a car.

If you are arguing fairly, you should be able to face potential criticisms fairly, and give your critics due credit, by recognizing the objections you expect your assertion will meet. This is the strategy H. L. Mencken uses in "The Penalty of Death" in this chapter, and he introduces it in his essay right at the beginning. (You might also tackle the opposition at the end of your essay or at relevant points throughout.) Notice that Mencken takes pains to dispense with his opponents: He doesn't just dismiss them; he reasons with them.

In your conclusion, briefly restate your claim, if possible in a fresh, pointed way. (For example, see the concluding sentence in the essay by William F. Buckley, Jr., in this chapter.) In an essay with a strong emotional component, you may want to end with an appeal to feelings. (See "Live Free and Starve" by Chitra Divakaruni.)

Finally, don't forget the power of humor in argument. You don't have to crack gratuitous jokes, but there is often an advantage in having a reader or listener who laughs on your side. When Abraham Lincoln debated Stephen Douglas, he triumphed in his reply to Douglas's snide remark that Lincoln had once been a bartender. "I have long since quit my side of the bar," Lincoln declared, "while Mr. Douglas clings to his as tenaciously as ever."

In arguing—doing everything you can to bring your reader around to your view—you can draw on any method of writing discussed in this book. Arguing for or against further reductions in welfare funding, you might give **EXAMPLES** of wasteful spending, or of neighborhoods where welfare funds are still needed. You might analyze the **CAUSES** of social problems that call for welfare funds, or foresee the likely **EFFECTS** of cutting welfare programs or of keeping them. You might **COMPARE AND CONTRAST** the idea of slashing welfare funds with the idea of increasing them. You could use **NARRATION** to tell a pointed story; you could use **DESCRIPTION** to portray certain welfare recipients and their neighborhoods. If it suited your purposes, you could employ several of these methods in writing a single argument.

You will rarely find, when you begin to write a persuasive paper, that you have too much evidence to support your claim. But unless you're writing a term paper and have months to spend on it, you're limited in how much evidence you can gather. Begin by stating your claim. Make it narrow enough to support in the time you have available. For a paper due a week from now, the opinion that "our city's downtown area has a serious litter problem" can probably be backed up in part by your own eyewitness reports. But to support the claim "Litter is one of the worst environmental problems of North American cities," you would surely need to spend time in a library.

In rewriting, you may find yourself tempted to keep all the evi-

dence you have collected with such effort. Of course, some of it may not support your claim; some may seem likely to persuade the reader only to go to sleep. If so, throw it out. A stronger argument will remain.

CHECKLIST FOR REVISING ARGUMENT OR PERSUASION

- ✓ **AUDIENCE.** Have you taken account of your readers' probable views? Have you reasoned with readers, not attacked them? Are your emotional appeals appropriate to readers' likely feelings? Do you acknowledge opposing views?
- ✓ **THESIS.** Does your argument have a thesis, a claim about how your subject is or should be? Is the thesis narrow enough to argue convincingly in the space and time available? Is it stated clearly? Is it reasonable?
- ✓ **EVIDENCE.** Is your thesis well supported with facts, statistics, expert opinions, and examples? Is your evidence recent and fair?
- ✓ **WARRANT.** Have you made sound connections between your evidence and your thesis or claim?
- ✓ **LOGICAL FALLACIES.** Have you avoided common errors in reasoning, such as oversimplifying or begging the question? (See pp. 381–83 for a list of fallacies.)
- ✓ **STRUCTURE.** Does your organization lead readers through your argument step by step, building to your strongest ideas and frequently connecting your evidence to your central claim?

ARGUMENT AND PERSUASION IN A PARAGRAPH: TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

Arguing About Television

This self-contained paragraph, written for *The Brief Bedford Reader*, argues that TV news aims for entertainment at the expense of serious coverage of events and issues. The argument here could serve a number of different purposes in full essays: For instance, in a paper claiming that television is our least reliable source of news, the paragraph would give one cause of unreliability; or in an essay analyzing television news, the paragraph would examine one element.

Television news has a serious failing: It's show business. Unlike a newspaper, its every image has to entertain the average beer drinker. To score high ratings and win advertisers, the visual medium favors the spectacular: riots, tornados, air

Topic sentence: the

crashes. Now that satellite transmission invites live coverage, newscasters go for the fast-breaking story at the expense of thoughtful analysis. "The more you can get data out instantly," says media critic Jeff Greenfield, "the more you rely on instant data to define the news." TV zooms in on people who make news, but, to avoid boredom, won't let them argue or explain. (How can they, in speeches limited to fifteen seconds?) In 1996, as American missiles bombed military sites in Iraq, President Clinton held a press conference to explain the action. His lengthy remarks were clipped to twenty seconds on one news broadcast, and then an anchorwoman digested the opposition to a single line: "Republicans tonight were critical of the president's actions." During the 1996 presidential election, both candidates sometimes deliberately packaged bad news so that it could not be distilled to a sound bite on the evening news—and thus would not make the evening news at all. Americans who rely on television for their news (two-thirds, according to recent polls) exist on a starvation diet.

Arguing in an Academic Discipline

Taken from a textbook on public relations, the following paragraph argues that lobbyists (who work to persuade public officials in behalf of a cause) are not slick manipulators but something else. The paragraph falls in the textbook's section on lobbying as a form of public relations, and its purpose is to correct a mistaken definition.

Although the public stereotypes a lobbyist as a fast-talking person twisting an elected official's arm to get special concessions, the reality is quite different. Today's lobbyist, who may be fully employed by one industry or represent a variety of clients, is often a quiet-spoken, well-educated man or woman armed with statistics and research reports. Robert Gray, former head of Hill and Knowlton's Washington office and a public affairs expert for thirty years, adds, "Lobbying is no longer a booze and buddies business. It's presenting honest facts and convincing Congress that your side has more merit than the other." He rejects lobbying as being simply "influence peddling and button-holing" top administration officials. Although the public has the perception that lobbying is done only by big business, Gray correctly points out that a variety of special interests also do it. These may include such groups as the Sierra Club, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the American Federation of Labor. Even the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive

Evidence:

Expert opinion

Facts and examples

Statistic

Topic sentence: the claim

Evidence:

Expert opinion

Facts and examples

battle against restrictions on breast implants. Lobbying, quite literally, is an activity in which widely diverse groups and organizations engage as an exercise of free speech and representation in the marketplace of ideas. Lobbyists often balance each other and work toward legislative compromises that not only benefit their self-interests but society as a whole.

—Dennis L. Wilcox, Phillip H. Ault,
and Warren K. Agee, *Public
Relations: Strategies and Tactics*

ARGUMENT AND PERSUASION ELSEWHERE IN THE BRIEF BEDFORD READER

The essays below, each illustrating some other method or methods of development, also argue in support of a claim.

PART ONE

Barbara Huttman, "A Crime of Compassion"
Anna Quindlen, "Homeless"
Nancy Mairs, "Disability"
Linnea Saukko, "How to Poison the Earth"
Judy Brady, "I Want a Wife"
Armin A. Brott, "Not All Men Are Sly Foxes"
Barbara Ehrenreich, "In Defense of Talk Shows"
William Lutz, "The World of Doublespeak"
Gore Vidal, "Drugs"
Meghan Daum, "Safe-Sex Lies"
Scott Russell Sanders, "Homeplace"
Marie Winn, "TV Addiction"
Bruno Bettelheim, "The Holocaust"

PART TWO

Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream"

CASE STUDY
Using Argument and Persuasion

As a college freshman, Kristen Corcoran commuted to school at night. In the following letter, she appealed to her college's president to have a parking ticket canceled because legal parking was unavailable.

Corcoran's letter is a model of argument for a specific purpose, but it didn't start out that way. In her much longer first draft, she let her anger push her into detailing every one of her five previous parking difficulties and criticizing the president personally for not solving the problem. She did not get to her request to have the ticket canceled until the very end.

Reviewing her draft, Corcoran realized that she was trying to negotiate with the president, not tell her off, and for that a more direct, conciliatory approach was needed. In the revision you see here, Corcoran focuses immediately on her purpose for writing, summarizes her problems with parking, and takes the tack of informing, rather than criticizing, the president.

1073 Dogwood Terrace
North Andover, MA 01845
May 2, 1999

President Delores Reed
North State College
755 Little Road
Danvers, MA 01923

Dear President Reed:

I write to ask you to rescind a ten-dollar citation I received on April 4 for parking in North State's Lot E. I know that this lot is reserved for faculty use, but flooding in three of the four commuter lots left me with no reasonable parking alternatives. The campus police have not been able to help me, so I turn to you.

As you know, flooding is a recurring problem at North State, but perhaps you don't know how it affects commuting students. April 4 was one of

six evenings this semester when I arrived to find Lots A, C, and D overrun by nearby marshes. On the other nights, Lot B filled quickly with cars and I was forced on two occasions to hunt for parking in the crowded residential areas off-campus. On April 4, I chose not to spend a half-hour finding a space and parked in Lot E. Many of its spaces are vacant at night when there are fewer classes and most campus offices are closed.

I understand from the campus police that North State has no plan for solving this seasonal problem. I, like hundreds of other commuter students, paid fifty dollars for a parking permit in the beginning of the semester and should be able to expect convenient parking like that described in North State's brochures. The parking problem is a serious one that affects not only commuters, who make up more than half of the student body, but also North State's neighbors, who are inconvenienced by crowds of cars monopolizing their streets each spring.

Please rescind my ticket and try to create some solutions to this problem. As a first step, may I suggest amending the school's parking policy to allow commuter use of Lot E in emergencies?

Sincerely,

Kristen Corcoran

Kristen Corcoran

H. L. MENCKEN

HENRY LOUIS MENCKEN (1880–1956) was a native of Baltimore, where for four decades he worked as newspaper reporter, editor, and columnist. In the 1920s, his boisterous, cynical observations on American life, appearing regularly in *The Smart Set* and later in *The American Mercury* (which he founded and edited), made him probably the most widely quoted writer in the country. As an editor and literary critic, Mencken championed Sinclair Lewis, Theodore Dreiser, and other realistic writers. As a social critic, he leveled blasts at pomp, hypocrisy, and the middle classes (whom he labeled “the booboisie”). (The publication of *The Diary of H. L. Mencken* in 1989 revealed more of its author’s outspoken opinions and touched off a controversy: Was Mencken a bigot? The debate goes on.) In 1933, when Mencken’s attempts to laugh off the Depression began to ring hollow, his magazine died. He then devoted himself to revising and supplementing *The American Language* (4th ed., 1948), his learned and highly entertaining survey of a nation’s speech habits and vocabulary. Two dozen of Mencken’s books are now in print, including *A Mencken Chrestomathy* (1949), a representative selection of his best writings of various kinds; and *A Choice of Days* (1980), a selection from his memoirs.

The Penalty of Death

Above all, Mencken was a humorist whose thought had a serious core. He argues by first making the reader’s jaw drop, then inducing a laugh, and finally causing the reader to ponder, “Hmmm—what if he’s right?” The following still-controversial essay, from *Prejudices, Fifth Series* (1926), shows Mencken the persuader in top form as he argues in favor of capital punishment. In the essay following Mencken’s, Michael Kroll takes a very different approach to arguing about the same issue.

Of the arguments against capital punishment that issue from up-lifters, two are commonly heard most often, to wit:

1. That hanging a man (or frying him or gassing him) is a dreadful business, degrading to those who have to do it and revolting to those who have to witness it.
2. That it is useless, for it does not deter others from the same crime.

The first of these arguments, it seems to me, is plainly too weak to need serious refutation. All it says, in brief, is that the work of the hangman is unpleasant. Granted. But suppose it is? It may be quite

are unpleasant, and yet no one thinks of abolishing them—that of the plumber, that of the soldier, that of the garbageman, that of the priest hearing confessions, that of the sandhog, and so on. Moreover, what evidence is there that any actual hangman complains of his work? I have heard none. On the contrary, I have known many who delighted in their ancient art, and practiced it proudly.

In the second argument of the abolitionists there is rather more force, but even here, I believe, the ground under them is shaky. Their fundamental error consists in assuming that the whole aim of punishing criminals is to deter other (potential) criminals—that we hang or electrocute A simply in order to so alarm B that he will not kill C. This, I believe, is an assumption which confuses a part with the whole. Deterrence, obviously, is *one* of the aims of punishment, but it is surely not the only one. On the contrary, there are at least a half dozen, and some are probably quite as important. At least one of them, practically considered, is *more* important. Commonly, it is described as revenge, but revenge is really not the word for it. I borrow a better term from the late Aristotle: *katharsis*. *Katharsis*, so used, means a salubrious discharge of emotions, a healthy letting off of steam. A schoolboy, disliking his teacher, deposits a tack upon the pedagogical chair; the teacher jumps and the boy laughs. This is *katharsis*. What I contend is that one of the prime objects of all judicial punishments is to afford the same grateful relief (*a*) to the immediate victims of the criminal punished, and (*b*) to the general body of moral and timorous men.

These persons, and particularly the first group, are concerned only indirectly with deterring other criminals. The thing they crave primarily is the satisfaction of seeing the criminal actually before them suffer as he made them suffer. What they want is the peace of mind that goes with the feeling that accounts are squared. Until they get that satisfaction they are in a state of emotional tension, and hence unhappy. The instant they get it they are comfortable. I do not argue that this yearning is noble; I simply argue that it is almost universal among human beings. In the face of injuries that are unimportant and can be borne without damage it may yield to higher impulses; that is to say, it may yield to what is called Christian charity. But when the injury is serious Christianity is adjourned, and even saints reach for their sidearms. It is plainly asking too much of human nature to expect it to conquer so natural an impulse. A keeps a store and has a bookkeeper, B. B steals \$700, employs it in playing at dice or bingo, and is cleaned out. What is A to do? Let B go? If he does so he will be unable to sleep at night. The sense of injury, of injustice, of frustration will haunt him like pruritus. So he turns B over to the police, and they hustle B to prison. Thereafter A can sleep. More, he has pleasant dreams. He pictures B chained to the

scorpions. It is so agreeable that it makes him forget his \$700. He has got his *katharsis*.

The same thing precisely takes place on a larger scale when there is a crime which destroys a whole community's sense of security. Every law-abiding citizen feels menaced and frustrated until the criminals have been struck down—until the communal capacity to get even with them, and more than even, has been dramatically demonstrated. Here, manifestly, the business of deterring others is no more than an afterthought. The main thing is to destroy the concrete scoundrels whose act has alarmed everyone, and thus made everyone unhappy. Until they are brought to book that unhappiness continues; when the law has been executed upon them there is a sigh of relief. In other words, there is *katharsis*.

I know of no public demand for the death penalty for ordinary crimes, even for ordinary homicides. Its infliction would shock all men of normal decency of feeling. But for crimes involving the deliberate and inexcusable taking of human life, by men openly defiant of all civilized order—for such crimes it seems, to nine men out of ten, a just and proper punishment. Any lesser penalty leaves them feeling that the criminal has got the better of society—that he is free to add insult to injury by laughing. That feeling can be dissipated only by a recourse to *katharsis*, the invention of the aforesaid Aristotle. It is more effectively and economically achieved, as human nature now is, by wafting the criminal to realms of bliss.

The real objection to capital punishment doesn't lie against the actual extermination of the condemned, but against our brutal American habit of putting it off so long. After all, every one of us must die soon or late, and a murderer, it must be assumed, is one who makes that sad fact the cornerstone of his metaphysic. But it is one thing to die, and quite another thing to lie for long months and even years under the shadow of death. No sane man would choose such a finish. All of us, despite the Prayer Book, long for a swift and unexpected end. Unhappily, a murderer, under the irrational American system, is tortured for what, to him, must seem a whole series of eternities. For months on end he sits in prison while his lawyers carry on their idiotic buffoonery with writs, injunctions, mandamuses, and appeals. In order to get his money (or that of his friends) they have to feed him with hope. Now and then, by the imbecility of a judge or some trick of juridic science, they actually justify it. But let us say that, his money all gone, they finally throw up their hands. Their client is now ready for the rope or the chair. But he must still wait for months before it fetches him.

That wait, I believe, is horribly cruel. I have seen more than one man sitting in the death-house, and I don't want to see any more.

him the day after the last court dissipates his last hope? Why torture him as not even cannibals would torture their victims? The common answer is that he must have time to make his peace with God. But how long does that take? It may be accomplished, I believe, in two hours quite as comfortably as in two years. There are, indeed, no temporal limitations upon God. He could forgive a whole herd of murderers in a millionth of a second. More, it has been done.

QUESTIONS ON MEANING

1. Identify Mencken's main reasons for his support of capital punishment. What is his *THESIS*?
2. In paragraph 3, Mencken asserts that there are at least half a dozen reasons for punishing offenders. In his essay, he mentions two, deterrence and revenge. What others can you supply?
3. For which class of offenders does Mencken advocate the death penalty?
4. What is Mencken's "real objection" to capital punishment?

QUESTIONS ON WRITING STRATEGY

1. How would you characterize Mencken's humor? Point to examples of it. In light of the grim subject, do you find the humor funny?
2. In his first paragraph, Mencken pares his subject down to manageable size. What techniques does he employ for this purpose?
3. At the start of paragraph 7, Mencken shifts his stance from concern for the victims of crime to concern for prisoners awaiting execution. Does the shift help or weaken the effectiveness of his earlier justification for capital punishment?
4. Do you think the author expects his *AUDIENCE* to agree with him? At what points does he seem to recognize the fact that some readers may see things differently?
5. In paragraphs 2 and 3, Mencken uses *ANALOGIES* in an apparent attempt to strengthen his argument. What are the analogies? Do they seem false to you? (See pp. 382–83 for a discussion of false analogy.) Do you think Mencken would agree with your judgment?
6. **OTHER METHODS.** To explain what he sees as the most important aim of capital punishment, Mencken uses *DEFINITION*. What does he define, and what techniques does he use to make the definition clear?

QUESTIONS ON LANGUAGE

1. Mencken opens his argument by referring to those who reject capital punishment as "uplifters." What *CONNOTATIONS* does this word have for you? Does the use of this "loaded" word strengthen or weaken Mencken's posi-

if the answer is yes, I rise a happy man.' I, on the other hand, wake neither particularly happy nor unhappy, but to the extent that my mood is affected by the question whether I need to write a column that morning, the impact of Monday-Wednesday-Friday—the days when he must write a newspaper column—is definitely negative. Because I do not like to write, for the simple reason that writing is extremely hard work, and I do not 'like' extremely hard work."

Still, in the course of a "typical year," Buckley estimates that he produces not only 150 newspaper columns, but also a dozen longer articles, eight or ten speeches, fifty introductions for his television program, various editorial pieces for the magazine he edits, *The National Review*, and a book or two. "Why do I do so much? ... It is easier to stay up late working for hours than to take one tenth the time to inquire into the question whether the work is worth performing."

In the introduction to another book, *A Hymnal: The Controversial Arts*, Buckley states an attitude toward writing that most other writers would not share. "I have discovered, in sixteen years of writing columns," he declares, "that there is no observable difference in the quality of that which is written at very great speed (twenty minutes, say), and that which takes three or four times as long. ... Pieces that take longer to write sometimes, on revisiting them, move along grumpily."

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Given that he so dislikes writing, why does Buckley do it?
2. Buckley's attitude toward giving time to writing is unusual. What is the more usual view of writing?

CHITRA DIVAKARUNI

Born in 1956 in Calcutta, India, CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI spent nineteen years in her homeland before immigrating to the United States. She holds an M.A. from Wright State University and a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. Her books, often addressing the immigrant experience in America, include the novels *The Mistress of Spice* (1997) and *Sister of My Heart* (1999), the collection of stories *Arranged Marriage* (1995), and the collection of poems *Leaving Yuba City* (1997). A teacher of creative writing at Foothill College in California, Divakaruni has received a number of awards for her work, including the Before Columbus Foundation's 1996 American Book Award. Since 1991, Divakaruni has been the president of MAITRI, a San Francisco-based, nonprofit organization that helps South Asian victims of domestic abuse.

Live Free and Starve

Some of the consumer goods sold in the United States—shoes, clothing, toys, rugs—are made in countries whose labor practices do not meet U.S. standards for safety and fairness. As these practices have gained wide publicity in recent years, Americans have been horrified at tales of children put to work by force or under contracts (called *indentures*) with the children's parents. Shouldn't the United States use its power to stop such practices? In this essay, Divakaruni argues that efforts to do so, though certainly well intentioned, are nonetheless misguided. The essay first appeared in the online magazine *Salon* in October 1997.

Some days back, the House passed a bill that stated that the United States would no longer permit the import of goods from factories where forced or indentured child labor was used.¹ My liberal friends applauded the bill. It was a triumphant advance in the field of human rights. Now children in Third World countries wouldn't have to spend their days chained to their posts in factories manufacturing goods for other people to enjoy while their childhoods slipped by them. They could be free and happy, like American children.

I am not so sure.

It is true that child labor is a terrible thing, especially for those children who are sold to employers by their parents at the age of five or six.

¹At the time *The Brief Bedford Reader* was published, the House bill Divakaruni refers to had not made it out of Congress. Similar bills were still under consideration by committees of the House and the Senate. —Eds.

and have no way to protect themselves from abuse. In many cases it will be decades—perhaps a lifetime, due to the fines heaped upon them whenever they make mistakes—before they can buy back their freedom. Meanwhile these children, mostly employed by rug-makers, spend their days in dark, ill-ventilated rooms doing work that damages their eyes and lungs. They aren't even allowed to stand up and stretch. Each time they go to the bathroom, they suffer a pay cut.

But is this bill, which, if it passes the Senate and is signed by President Clinton, will lead to the unemployment of almost a million children, the answer? If the children themselves were asked whether they would rather work under such harsh conditions or enjoy a leisure that comes without the benefit of food or clothing or shelter, I wonder what their response would be.

It is easy for us in America to make the error of evaluating situations in the rest of the world as though they were happening in this country and propose solutions that make excellent sense—in the context of our society. Even we immigrants, who should know better, have wiped from our minds the memory of what it is to live under the kind of desperate conditions that force a parent to sell his or her child. Looking down from the heights of Maslow's pyramid,² it seems inconceivable to us that someone could actually prefer bread to freedom.

When I was growing up in Calcutta, there was a boy who used to work in our house. His name was Nimai, and when he came to us, he must have been about ten or so, just a little older than my brother and I. He'd been brought to our home by his uncle, who lived in our ancestral village and was a field laborer for my grandfather. The uncle explained to my mother that Nimai's parents were too poor to feed their several children, and while his older brothers were already working in the fields and earning their keep, Nimai was too frail to do so. My mother was reluctant to take on a sickly child who might prove more of a burden than a help, but finally she agreed, and Nimai lived and worked in our home for six or seven years. My mother was a good employer—Nimai ate the same food that we children did and was given new clothes during Indian New Year, just as we were. In the time between his chores—dusting and sweeping and pumping water from the tube-well and running to the market—my mother encouraged him to learn to read and write. Still, I would not disagree with anyone who says that it was hardly a desirable existence for a child.

But what would life have been like for Nimai if an anti-child-labor law had prohibited my mother from hiring him? Every year, when we

²The psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–70) proposed a “hierarchy of needs” in the shape of a five-level pyramid with survival needs at the bottom and “self-actualization” and “self-transcendence” at the top. According to Maslow, one must satisfy the needs

went to visit our grandfather in the village, we were struck by the many children we saw by the mud roads, their ribs sticking out through the rags they wore. They trailed after us, begging for a few paise.³ When the hunger was too much to bear, they stole into the neighbors' fields and ate whatever they could find—raw potatoes, cauliflower, green sugar cane and corn torn from the stalk—even though they knew they'd be beaten for it. Whenever Nimai passed these children, he always walked a little taller. And when he handed the bulk of his earnings over to his father, there was a certain pride in his eye. Exploitation, you might be thinking. But he thought he was a responsible member of his family.

A bill like the one we've just passed is of no use unless it goes hand in hand with programs that will offer a new life to these newly released children. But where are the schools in which they are to be educated? Where is the money to buy them food and clothing and medication, so that they don't return home to become the extra weight that capsizes the already shaky raft of their family's finances? Their own governments, mired in countless other problems, seem incapable of bringing these services to them. Are we in America who, with one blithe stroke of our congressional pen, rendered these children jobless, willing to shoulder that burden? And when many of these children turn to the streets, to survival through thievery and violence and begging and prostitution—as surely in the absence of other options they must—are we willing to shoulder that responsibility?

QUESTIONS ON MEANING

1. What do you take to be Divakaruni's PURPOSE in this essay? At what point did it become clear?
2. What are “Third World countries” (para. 1)?
3. From the further information given in the footnote on page 412, what does it mean to be “[l]ooking down from the heights of Maslow's pyramid” (para. 5)? What point is Divakaruni making here?
4. In paragraph 8, Divakaruni suggests some of the reasons that children in other countries may be forced or sold into labor. What are they?

QUESTIONS ON WRITING STRATEGY

1. Where in her argument does Divakaruni specifically acknowledge her audience's likely views?

³Paise are the smallest unit of Indian currency, worth a fraction of an American